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ABSTRACT

The paper describes transportation problems encountered and solutions employed in delivering systems of comprehensive services to handicapped children in Anderson County, Tennessee, a predominantly rural area with considerable mountain area. Detailed are methods of transportation utilized in the four different program areas of the county special education program, which encompass children with various disabilities. Methods described include use of regular school buses, specially equipped school buses, station wagons, and carryalls. Alternatives for transportation assistance to both students and their parents (when visiting agencies or clincis) are mentioned. Suggestions offered for the development of a special education transportation system in a rural area concern maximum use of regular transportation facilities, when it is more feasible to bring the students to the services than vice versa, multiple use of the same vehicle, selection of drivers, multiple roles of drivers, availability of substitute drivers, owning rather than contracting for transportation, and most efficient modes of transportation in rural areas. (KW)

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Presentation to be made as part of the panel on New Approaches to Transportation in Sparsley Populated Areas at C.E.C. Memphis Regional Conference, 12/3/71, by Z. M. Brody, Director, Daniel Arthur Rehabilitation Center, Oak Ridge, Tennessee

TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN RURAL AREAS - A SPECIFIC SOLUTION AND SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR DELIVERY SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

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A. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND GENERAL COMMENTS

Historically, comprehensive special education services have been slow to develop in rural or sparsely populated areas. It is difficult enough to establish a good delivery system in a metropolitan area, but our many implementation problems are even more compounded when we move into the rural areas. One of the main factors in the slow development of delivery systems of comprehensive services to the handicapped in such areas is transportation.

When planning a special education program or developing a delivery system of special services, a number of factors must be considered including such things as demonstrating a need, securing funds, available space for the program, adequate staffing both educational and ancillary, a favorable attitude on the part of staff members, parents, students and community, and transportation, is probably the most unique to the development of special services in rural areas.

It should be noted that special education services or programming are no different than those for health, general educational and welfare services insofar as transportation is concerned in a predominantly rural area. Every type delivery system for every purpose is dependent upon this factor and is receiving more and more concern as various federally funded projections are initiated. Our comprehensive and community oriented centers for the mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed will create a demand for much more transportation programs in both urban and rural areas. The same

demand will be created by the soon to be funded day care programs for the normal as well as the handicapped child.

There is no way to specifically plan a complete transportation system for the wrong types of rural systems that we are discussing today. The transportation system would vary according to the individual school system and its program of special services as well as geographic situation, population distribution, and need. For example, most work study programs in rural areas bring the youngsters into a central area for cooperative work with special education and vocational rehabilitation. In others, these programs are located in the respective local high schools which brings about a different system of transportation.

May I go on record as saying that comprehensive special education services can be made available for the handicapped student in rural areas. It is not an easy thing to plan and develop. It is not inexpensive. Unfortunately the need for transportation is often used as an excuse not to start a program in a rural school system.

As in all other delivery systems, it is quite clear that the service can either be taken to the handicapped student or the student can be brought to the service. This is a rather simple statement but does set the tone for any discussion of transportation in a rural area. In Anderson County, as in most other places, we utilize both systems.

For the sake of this presentation to be made as a part of this panel, most of my remarks will be aimed at transportation for the handicapped student. Some reference will also be made, however, to the problems encountered by the required transportation of the parent of the handicapped child and the respective staff members working with these youngsters.

B. ANDERSON COUNTY SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

In Anderson County we have a total of approximately 60,000 people. Approximately half of these are a responsibility of the Anderson County School System, as such, with a school enrollment at the present time of close to 8,000 students from kindergarten through the twelfth grade. There are two other school systems in the County, Oak Ridge City and Clinton City, which are not covered by this presentation. There is some utilization of the County transportation system for the handicapped children in these two neighboring systems.

Anderson County, outside of Oak Ridge, is fairly typical of Appalachia. It is a large, predominately rural county with considerable mountain area. There are a few small towns with most of the population living in small clusters throughout the entire area. Fortunately the roads are in good shape in spite of considerable coal truck traffic.

The special education program in Anderson County is primarily concerned with four program areas. We have twenty-three EMR classes from primary to secondary groups (work/study) spread throughout the eighteen schools in the county. Most of these youngsters are able to ride the regular school bus serving their community school. Special arrangements need to be made for a few of these students.

The second program is a thirty-three teacher special education school located within the Daniel Arthur Rehabilitation Center. This program involves six SMR classes, sixteen multiple handicapped classes, one class for the visually handicapped, three for the deaf and hard of hearing including pre-school aged and three for children with severe organic speech problems. The enrollment of this special school is approximately 240 youngsters. The Center itself is located in Oak Ridge and serves some nine surrounding

counties containing some sixteen individual school systems. Approximately half of the handicapped children enrolled are from out-of-County systems

At the Center, we have a total of 21 vehicles. One of these is a regular 30 passenger school bus, the other is a 36 passenger specially equipped school bus, eight are station wagons and the remaining eleven are carryalls. These vehicles travel an average of 84 miles round trip each per day with a range of from 46 to 112 round trip miles. The smallest load is 8 children; the largest 24.

These vehicles are used to bring the students to the Center daily from as far away as fifty six miles with the average child traveling approxim ately 60 round trip miles per day. Those EMR students requiring special transportation are put on these vehicles. This would be the case of an extremely isolated EMR child whose needs could not be met in a regular classroom and required special class placement of the EMR student too old for the primary special class in his community school and needed to be transported to an intermediate group elsewhere.

Our program at the Rehabilitation Center is a comprehensive one. In spite of this, we have a nned for transportation to take children and their parents to and from other agencies and other clinic services. These may be in Oak Ridge or in Knoxville - for example, the Mental Health Center, a dentist, the Health Department, Crippled Children's Service Clinic, etc. We are fortunate in having a number of different alternatives here for transportation assistance which includes a number of our own volunteers, a formal program "Fish", and an itinerant aide/driver. Title I, Title VI and Title III provide funds for this type of service.

We also have three resource room type programs for special learning disabilities

which are located in one large elementary school with three other cooperative elementary schools in the same area.

The students in this program are programmed for two hours each day and spend the rest of the day with their regular teacher. A station wagon is used at this school to transport the handicapped students to and from the three feeder schools. One of the classroom attendnats does double duty as driver of this vehicle. The students are brought to the program due to the nature of the equipment used.

The last special program which we might refer to would be that of itinerant speech and hearing services and homebound program which are quite similar in nature as far as we are concerned this morning. We have only one full time homebound teacher. Each year, however, we probably end up having sufficient students with whom we work during the school year for two and a half to three positions. This situation is not an accident but, is planned. We feel that we want to use our regular classroom teachers for our homebound program in the respective school districts. This minimizes the mileage, provides the teachers with extra salary and these teachers usually have a better knowledge of the child, his situation, his abilities and his work habits. All of this provides for much better carryover once the child returns to regular school. The suggestion is made that use of such teachers in their respective school districts makes transportation a very manageable factor in the delivery of homebound instruction.

Our itinerant speech and hearing program is not any different from that in most other systems. Due to the extreme distances between our schools, however, we do assign our therapists to certain groupings in an attenpt to minimize the mileage factor. In spite of this, too much time is spend "on the road."

In extremely isolated rural situations, it may be possible to train multi-disciplinary specialists who could serve two or more categories of handicapped children. In Anderson County, for example, we have one school, Rosedale, which is extremely isolated and has a high incidence of handicapped children. We have recently developed a split position with a good EMR teacher also assuming some speech therapy responsibilities for part of the day. This lady has dual certification and has the consultative services of a number of our speech and hearing people in screening and staffing the children with whom she is working. It would have been almost impossible for us to have made speech therapy services available in this school without this sort of situation which we are studying closely. The school is so isolated, incidentally, that we transport the regular class teachers to the school in a County owned vehicle which saves extreme wear and tear on their own vehicles.

Getting parents in for conferences and group discussions is a problem anywhere. In rural areas it's more of a headache. Many of the fathers work miles from their homes and others do not get home until very late. The mothers do not have cars. In Anderson County, we attempt in every way possible to set these appointments and programs at a convenient hour. We also make available space whenever possible in our special education vehicles. We also use these vehicles to transport the parents during the day utilizing an itinerant driver. In many cases we end up going to the home which often times is not the most desireable particularly when we want to introduce the parents to the child's program and/or to develop an educational program with other parents.

Another situation in which transportation has become a major factor is programming for pre-school aged handicapped youngsters. In most cases, these 3, 4, and 5 year old children cannot tolerate traveling long distances. Their programs are usually of half-day duration which requires their going home at noon. The

age and handicap would preclude their riding regular buses, although this has been attempted on occasion. The ideal situation is to locate these programs closer home and adjacent to a community school. This would add to the possibility of continual and frequent parental involvement. It would also make available a sizeable number of normal children for integration purposes, if only on a part-time basis. In Anderson County, we follow this procedure except that we do have a centralized program for handicapped pre-school children who require a number of services for complete rehabilitation. Another transportation problem which we are having to face in Anderson County is that involving our Work/Study Cooperative students. This program is in two of our junior high schools, three of our high schools and at the Rehabilitation Center. The transportation problems encountered are, of course, not unique but have required considerable planning. For example, we are concerned with how to get students to their out of school work assignments which may be some eight to ten miles from the school. A few and very few of the retarded youngsters have vehicles of their own. Some have been willing to "thumb" rides which is not good. We have arranged for our special education teachers to take most of the youngsters to their jobs using their own cars with Vocational Rehabilitation paying mileage. Each of these private vehicles is put on the fleet liability insurance policy of the School Board. There is still the problem of collision or comprehension insurance for these private vehicles, and some teachers are actually afraid to transport the children themselves which is understandable in some situations. An alternative might be the placement of a county-owned vehicle in the respective schools to be used for this purpose. A related problem is the transportation of the work/study teacher to the various employers seeking jobs and supervising trainees. Here a private vehicle is used and mileage is paid by Vocational Rehabilitation.

Transportation has proven to be a problem in our sheltered workshop activities and in other related services offered by Vocational Rehabilitation. Since many of these youngsters are over 21 years of age and are not the responsibility of the school system as such, their transportation has been left, more or less, to chance or to volunteers. This has not been very adequate. In Anderson County, we have attempted to utilize our regular transportation system and more particularly our special education vehicles to transport these clients and trainees whenever and wherever space was available. It should be made clear, however, that eligible students have first priority for any available vehicle space. It certainly would not seem desirable to run parallel transportation systems for these older handicapped individuals. It may be that some specific cooperative and sharing arrangement can be worked out.

C. SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Any transportation system, as well as the delivery system itself, needs continual study, planning and updating. By that I have reference to the fact that available space may become available in a certain school which was formerly crowded and in which special services can be developed. These new services may require transportation and/or transportation changing for the feeder schools. We may add classes, for example, at a high school in our work/study programs which require additional transportation development. Many of our families in our rural area of Appalachia are migratory. These constant moves by large numbers of children, many of whom are handicapped, require constant changes in our transportation system. Not only are they moving in and out of our systems but they are moving from one end of a system to another as the "rent comes due" or a job becomes available.

The use of regular transportation facilities should be utilized as much as possible. These vehicles and their routes are available; it's much cheaper. There's less stigma for the handicapped child to ride one of these buses; and at times, we are able to utilize a "big brother" approach with an older sibling or even a close friend helping the handicapped.

Whenever children are so uniquely handicapped as to require a multiplicity of services, it is much more feasible and effective to regionalize such staff members and programs and <u>bring the students to the services</u>.

It is necessary to be innovative. For example, the same vehicle used for special education can be used for field trips, adult basic education at night and clinic visits during the day.

There is no reason whatsoever why different etiologies cannot be grouped in the same vehicle - SMR's, EMR's, sensory handicaps, orthopedic cases, emotionally disturbed, etc. It is certainly much more expensive to run parallel or duplicate routes for youngsters with different types of handicaps. In fact, whenever space is available, sheltered workshop clients could utilize space on a vehicle with the approval of the School Board.

Consolidation of schools has helped our situation in Anderson County and the same would hold true for other rural areas. It was utterly impossible to supply adequate diagnostic, treatment and other special services to the more than 30 small schools which once existed in Anderson County. Through consolidation, we are able to work with much larger number of students in fewer locations.

The driver is a very important person and should be selected with some degree of caution. We feel that the driver is very important in helping us with behavior modification, encouraging school attendance and as a public relations factor with the community and parents. They need pre-service

orientation and training and periodic in-service training.

In most rural areas, the usual route will be into the program and back out again at the end of the day. This is in contrast to the constant "in and out" by drivers in metropolitan programs. It is for this reason that drivers should be used whenever possible as classroom attendants or aides or perhaps school secretaries in rural systems. This double use of the drivers adds to their income, makes them even more a part of the total special education program and allows the vehicle to be used for other purposes during the intervening hours. Use of teachers as drivers is <u>not</u> suggested except where absolutely necessary. Such double employment usually precludes the teacher from attending school meetings, staffings, etc.

It is extremely important to have a cadre of substitute drivers available. It should be remembered that these should, if at all possible, also serve as classroom attendants and aides and should be so prepared. Non-working parents can serve in this capacity. They should be familiar with the respective routes and related duties.

It has been our finding that it is much better for a school system to own their own vehicles rather than to contract transportation. The cost is lower. There is a consistency of service and much more flexibility in routing and use of vehicles for other related purposes.

It is extremely important to develop a plan for vehicle depreciation and replacement. With a large fleet of vehicles, this can be a quite costly thing and should be arranged with the appropriate budgetary and administrative personnel beforehand so that nothing is left unsaid and a replacement schedule can be realized and put into action on a continuing basis.

Arrangements should be made for gas and repair problems, both routine and of an emergency nature. When extremely long and isolated routes are

considered, it is necessary to have some sort of gasing points at the ends of the route. Some sort of emergency arrangements must be planned for tires, batteries, gasing. Credit cards, incidentally, have been used quite nicely in our program. On a cold winter morning there is nothing worse than to get a phone call from a driver who is forty miles away that "her station wagon won't start." Some pre-planning can hold such situations to a minimum. Different types of vehicles should be considered for different type routes and different needs of the individual children. For example, carryalls are not the greatest for mountain roads. They are top heavy. They are also not the greatest for severely physically involved youngsters, particularly those who are quite heavy. A station wagon on the other hand is not as durable as the carryall and does not look like a school bus which can be a safety factor. Specially constructed or equipped vehicles certainly have their place whenever severely physically handicapped children and/or long routes are to be considered.

Considering mileage, individual stops, control of children, safety factors, types of roads, etc., carryalls and station wagons are considered the best and most efficient mode of transportation in rural areas as compared to private automobiles, taxis, special buses and regular buses.

Mileage should be limited, of course, as much as possible but should not be a barrier to the implementation of services to the handicapped. The basic cost is in the vehicle, its maintenance, and the salary of the driver. A few more miles will not add significantly to the expense of a particular vehicle.

It is extremely important to have a good knowledge of the entire road system in an area to be served. Not only is the distance involved important; but the type of roads, the traffic, the desirable pick up spots are all important and should be considered when planning and developing a route. A few

extra miles are much more desirable than a poor road, heavy traffic, and absolutely no safe pick up spots.

On extremely long routes it is much more feasible to have the respective drivers live at the end of the route so as to cut down on mileage, expense, etc. This is difficult but certainly not impossible to bring about in rural areas. It takes time and occasionally some experimentation but it is certainly more profitable in the long run. One of the chief concerns is the safety of the vehicle when kept away from the program at night and over the week-end.

It is important to remember that we are concerned with mileage but also time on the road, both for the children and the drivers. It is for this reason that the suggestion is made that those vehicles arriving at the program first or earliest should be started home first. The desired maximum time on the road should not be much more than an hour and fifteen minutes in the morning and the same time in the afternoon. At the Center, our first child is picked up around 7:30 A.M. and our last child arrives home around 4:00 P.M.